

Bollywood's Christians in Hindu Modernity

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Abstract:

The article analyzes three award-winning Bollywood movies released between 2004-2014 with a focus on the interactions between Christian and Hindu characters. The decade witnessed the exit and re-entry of the Hindu Right, and I characterize the period as centrist, liberal, and secular. Yet I argue that discourses of Hindu-ness permeate various avenues of public life such that India is always already imagined to be Hindu. Hence, the aim is to show how Hindu-ness and Indian-ness are performed and represented across the political spectrum. In this context, Hindu modernity is defined as reactionary to European modernity that uses the same model but emphasizes tradition as a point of difference. Hindu modernity is encoded in tradition. The interactions analyzed in the article show that the Christian is most distant from tradition, while the Hindu is closest, and, in the process, positioned to integrate the former's Otherness into Hindu modernity. The analysis is divided into three themes: *Page 3* (Bhandarkar, 2005) shows that Otherness cannot always be integrated; *Rock On!!* (Kapoor, 2008) identifies a certain type of Otherness that can be integrated; *Dum Maaro Dum* (Sippy, 2011) explores a location (Goa) as a site of modernity. I conclusively argue that reactionary politics in a perpetual derivative of western modernity is responsible for much of the postcolonial angst.

Keywords: cultural and critical studies, postcolonial criticism, race and gender in media, religion and culture, South Asian popular culture

Introduction

The Bollywood Hindi-language movie *Rock On!!* (Kapoor, 2008) follows a rekindling friendship between two estranged members of a rock band. Aditya "Adi" Shroff is a Hindu character whose Hindu-ness is unacknowledged, and, hence, occupies the position of the normative subject. Adi is not actively racialized; his presence is not constructed with caste, gender, and religion. He is a post-identity subject whose presence is neutral and natural. As the normative subject, he is a stand-

in for Indian. The other friend, Joseph “Joe” Mascarenhas, is racialized as Christian. Joe’s name signifies his religion – Joseph is biblical, Mascarenhas is Portuguese – and alludes to Roman Catholics who converted to Christianity during colonialism (see Fernando & Gispert-Sauch, 2004).¹ A crucifix is visible around his neck, and his house is decorated with Christian insignia. His difference to and separation from Adi’s normativity is marked on his body and in the spaces he inhabits. In the movie, Joe cannot provide for his family and wholeheartedly contribute to the recovering band. When the band prepares for their final concert, Joe is seen seated in a taxi heading to a job that will stabilize his finances. But he forsakes the opportunity and arrives at the concert venue. Adi embraces Joe, walks him to the podium, and announces his arrival: “Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome on lead guitar, *mera dost* [my friend], *mera bhai* [my brother], Joseph Mascarenhas!” The embrace between the two men, but significantly extended from Adi, and his celebration of a familial connection exemplify Hindu modernity.

The narrative and scene between Adi and Joe reinforce the “mythic, masculinist vision of the national community” through the discourse of family and friendship (Basu, 2010a: 89). The national community is a masculinist vision because it is an imagination birthed from war in which only men participate (Banerjee, 2003, 2006). Such imaginations are mythic because women biologically reproduce the nation and boundaries of nationhood, participate in the ideological reproduction and transmission of culture, and serve as markers of caste, ethnic, racial, and religious differences in the Indian context (Nagel, 1998; Yuval-Davis & Anthias, 1989). The man-woman binary is used to discuss scholarship from a cultural moment when such distinctions were stable. But such myths narrate the nation (Bhabha, 1990). In these myths, the national community also imagines and narrates the Other to represent their anxieties. Muslims are the quintessential Other (Blom Hansen, 1996; Kazmi, 2010; Murty, 2009), whereas Christians are the extra-territorial Other included in the national community but nevertheless excluded because of an assumed intimacy with the colonizers. Christians and Muslims are Othered because the origins of their respective religions lie outside India in Palestine and Saudi Arabia, and the distinct cultural identities attributed to these ethnoreligious communities are incommensurable with ideas of the Self/Hindu-ness. Such narratives – in movies and politics – discursively construct a national community at the intersection of masculinity and ethnoreligious identity that exacerbates Otherness.

The default national community in India is Hindu (the normative subject), and ethnoreligious communities are minoritized and Othered in an imagined absence of Hindu-ness. The Other’s presence causes problems for the national community because the latter cannot appropriate “that [which] is incommensurable with the self, and hence outside its understanding and resistant to suppression” (Prakash, 2003: 58). In this context, Hindu modernity may be understood as an attempt to solve the problem of the Other, and reinforce the national community as Hindu. However, as postcolonial nationalism that continues from anti-colonial politics is reactionary to European modernity, Hindu modernity uses the same model but emphasizes tradition as a point of difference. Hindu modernity is encoded in tradition. Therefore, Adi’s discourse of “my friend, my brother” integrates the Other into the national community by solving the absence of Hindu-ness in Joe.

It is important to note that reactionary politics are not characteristic of postcolonialism as much they are inseparable from nationalism. An adjective before nationalism does not change its inherently reactionary nature that constructs binaries of Self and Other. The reactionary nature of nationalism is most evident in sentiments of one nation, one language, one religion that are the

basis of organization for most European nation-states, as well as contemporary forms of nationalism in the former colonies.

The discursive construction of the Christian in opposition to Hindu-ness vis-à-vis representations as liberal, modern, and westernized position the Hindu in a similar likeness but not quite alike. The association with western values is characteristic of Christians in Bollywood movies (see Dissanayake & Gokulsing, 2004; Dwyer, 2014). Bollywood's Christians are represented in a colonial hangover, longing for a past when the state was Christian (Malhotra & Alagh, 2004). Even in real life, the assumed intimacy with the colonizers imagines Christians to embody and inhabit a space of western modernity that challenges the nation-state's sovereignty (see Shourie, 1994, 2000). Hence, Christians are imagined and represented as residuals of colonialism. In contrast to the Christian, the Hindu is closest to Indian culture, tradition, and values (Murty, 2009). However, such characteristics are the opposite of modern. Nevertheless, Hindu modernity is discursively constructed within native rationality, i.e., a meaning-making process along the lines of post-structuralism that displaces Eurocentric modernist binaries. The Hindu can survive in a space of modernity and still adhere to tradition. Notwithstanding, there cannot be Hindu modernity that illustrates progress without discursively constructing the Christian as excessively progressive.

This paper analyzes narratives and specific scenes between Christian and Hindu characters from *Page 3* (Bhandarkar, 2005), *Rock On!!* (Kapoor, 2008), and *Dum Maaro Dum* (Sippy, 2011) to demonstrate the discursive construction of Hindu modernity. The academic aim is to illustrate the continuation of mythic and masculinist narrations that construct the national community within a cultural identity. However, rather than focus on the Hindu Right that wants to actualize a Hindu nation, I am interested in the decade between 2004-2014 when the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) led by the Indian National Congress (INC) formed the Central Government. The INC-UPA comprises ideologies that are centrist, liberal, and secular, but the INC-UPA's political position(s) is next to an extreme right opposition of the Hindu Right (Singh, 2003). The INC-UPA as a centrist, liberal, and secular alliance uses "the rhetoric of diversity [only] as a window dressing" (Roy, 2007: 3). The INC-UPA's reputation of violence against minoritized communities is localized, unlike the Hindu Right that tries to nationalize their rampage (Ogden, 2012; Rajagopal, 2004). In focusing on a period that experienced considerable political calm, unlike what followed post-2014 with the Hindu Right and Narendra Modi elected to public office, I aim to demonstrate how discourses of Hindu-ness permeate various avenues of public life across the political spectrum.

The following section provides an overview of European modernity and reactionary anti-colonial nationalism. Modernity (detached from location and singular meaning[s]) and Europe are conflated in Anglo-American scholarship (Bhambra, 2007), and, therefore, I intentionally use European as an adjective. I identify three characteristics of European modernity: Eurocentrism, the most notorious form of nationalism re-produced in the discursive formation of nations, the nation-state, and rationality. In the subsequent sections, I analyze *Page 3* to show how Otherness cannot always be integrated, *Rock On!!* to illustrate how a certain type of Otherness can be integrated, and *Dum Maaro Dum* to highlight space as a site of modernity. I conclusively consider some shortcomings of reactionary politics.

Modernity and Hindu Variants

European modernity refers to the developments in social organization, especially the formation of the nation-state (Appadurai, 1996; Bhambra, 2007, 2011; Kellner, 1999; Rappa, 2002; Wagner, 2012). I refer to European modernity as a discourse re-produced in the formation of Europe's subjectivity; the other interrelated discourses are capitalism and imperialism. These discourses form a matrix of subjectivity that interpellate other subjectivities such as notions of Self and Other. Additionally, I characterize European modernity with Eurocentrism, the nation-state, and rationality. The nation's relationship with cultural and social institutions and each other generates a discourse of nationalism consistent with European history: Europe was modern owing to its developments, and "pre-modern" or traditional cultures and societies were frozen in time – incapable of self-governance, irrational, and uncultured and uncivilized (Giddens, 1990; Turner, 1990). These characteristics make European modernity inseparable from the colonial discourse of expansion and imperialism. Furthermore, discourses of colonialism and nationalism situated in philosophical developments engendered the rational subject who could separate the traditional way of life from the modern, and distinguish and manage the disparate realms of science and religion (Prakash, 2003). These developments – Eurocentrism, the nation-state, and rationality – are essential characteristics of European and western modernity that anti-colonial nationalist movements incorporate into their configuration of a nation-state.

The forceful introduction of European modernity in the colonies set in motion movements for anti-colonial nationalism (Bhambra, 2011; Bose & Jalal, 2018; Chakrabarty, 2000, 2011; Chatterjee, 1989; Gupta, 2000; Jodhka, 2013). Hence, anti-colonial nationalism and postcolonial modernity are inseparable. As a reactionary response to the humiliating experience of colonialism, anti-colonial nationalism engaged in a modernizing venture while vociferously adhering to tradition (Anand, 2007; Belliappa, 2013; Blom Hansen, 1996). But the meaning(s) of tradition can range from Gandhian ascetic values and rural culture to a contrast against the West to bolster the native as equal or superior (Basu, 2008). In a critique of postcolonial nationalism of the late sixties, i.e., each nation has a "culture" and "tradition" from which it speaks as an act of anti-imperialist resistance, Ahmad (1992) observes that indigeneity characterized by culture and tradition is homogenized into a singular identity as the binary opposite of modern, modernity, and modernization. In the process, tradition is made compatible with modernity, and, whenever necessary, vice versa.

As anti-colonial nationalism was an exercise without the luxury of time, Indian nationalists constructed an idea of India that would appease Hindus and the nation's diverse communities (Bhatt, 2000, 2001). The "vision for an independent India was for it to engage on an equal footing with the more powerful nations of the West whilst also embodying a uniquely Indian modernity that was distinctive in terms of certain cultural traditions" (Belliappa, 2013: 55). An example of such a vision is the modernist practice of cartography: Ramaswamy (2010) analyzes cartographic representations of India that feature Hindu goddesses superimposed over the geographical landscape. Such representations reuse Britain's images (Britannia) and myths (a unified nation) to narrate the nation-state as equally modern. But cartography is a product of colonial expansion and modern science (Ramaswamy, 2010). The superimposition of a goddess on a colonial and scientific product is not a *faux pas*. Such representations are an articulate bastardization of the European Enlightenment that separated religion and science. The displacement of the religion-science binary is an exemplar of native rationality that departs from modernist epistemologies. The Indian practice of cartography shows how Hindu tradition encodes modernity. However,

Belliappa's (2013) "certain cultural traditions" are undeniably Hindu in origin – the Hindu goddesses on maps and the omnipresence of Hindu-ness in everyday culture. As Europe and modernity are conflated, Hindu modernity is conflated with India. Therefore, Indian modernity is Hindu modernity, and vice versa.

A conundrum of Hindu modernity is the distinction from contemporary forms of nationalism. As Kaviraj explains, after independence "the central question of Indian politics was the construction not of nationalism but of democracy" (2000: 154). I argue that anti-colonial nationalism concluded with the establishment of an independent nation-state. But nationalism continues in various forms – the nation is continually constructing a new identity – and hinges on discourses of modernity (Delanty & O'Mahony, 2002). For example, when the liberalization policies of 1991 pushed the nation into an increasingly competitive globalized economy, the then-government responded with an image of a modern India (Corbridge & Harriss, 2000). As a state apparatus, Bollywood promoted the family movie genre to balance the "Hindutva-liberalization dyad" between modernity and tradition (Sen, 2010: 148). Whereas modernity in Europe disintegrated the traditional family unit, modernity in India reinforced traditional familial alliances. The traditional cinematic family is yet another mythic vision of the national community because families rapidly nuclearized in the same decade of liberalization (Derné, 2008). However, I am concerned with Hindu modernity achieving a new nationalism – one that is wholly Hindu, one that solves the problem of the Other. Therefore, between the Hindu Right and INC-led UPA, each form of "nationalism merely replaces one elite with another while the underlying logic of modernization continues apace" (Delanty & O'Mahony, 2002: 45). There are several forms of nationalism, but the variants occur within modernity.

Bollywood's Christians in Hindu Modernity

There is a long history of Bollywood movies constructing and reinforcing the national community with masculinist and mythic narrations (Banerjee, 2016; Banerjee & Williams, 2019). The industry's history traces to a nativist cinema that organized alongside anti-colonial movements (see Lutgendorf, 2006; Wright, 2015). However, Bollywood's relationship with the state as an ideological apparatus transformed after independence. Bollywood now maintains the status quo (Rao, 2007). Rao's reference is to class dominance, but the meaning(s) of the status quo extends to cultural and social institutions that normalize the Hindu hegemony (Devasundaram, 2016; Hirji, 2010). Bollywood movies represent Hindu characters as normative subjects, and ethnoreligious communities as the Other, and, in the process, conflate India(n) with Hindu. Therefore, in Bollywood's relationship with the state, and normalization of the Hindu hegemony, an analysis of movies highlights the pervasiveness of Hindu-ness across the political spectrum.

In the following analysis, I follow the philosophical underpinnings of textual analysis, i.e., texts do not have an intended or singular meaning as they interact with the audience in different contexts to create meanings. The analysis also relies on the methodological approach of discursive formation. A discursive formation observes a "pattern of discursive events that refer to, or bring into being, a common object across a number of sites" (Barker, 2012: 500). In such an approach, culture is a representation of discourses, and media is one such representation. To understand media as culture and discourse, I approach camerawork, dialogues, music, paratextual material such as promotional work, and other sets of relationships involved in the moviemaking process as discourses from culture that represent culture. Therefore, in the following subsections, I examine

a constellation of discourses, imageries, and practices that discursively construct Hindu modernity vis-à-vis interactions between the Christian and Hindu characters. The aim is to show culture and media existing in a reciprocating ecology with contemporary and historical discourses.

Page 3 (2005) is directed by Madhur Bhandarkar, and features Konkana Sen Sharma as the protagonist. The movie received “Best Film” and Sen Sharma was recognized as “Best Female Debut” by the National Film Awards. The following analysis focuses on a parallel narrative that contributes marginally to the movie. However, it is a compelling exemplar of Hindu modernity. In this narrative, a drug dealer, Gomes – a Christian last name – is arrested and murdered. The way the scene develops shows Otherness that challenges the culture, tradition, and values of Hindu modernity cannot integrate into the nation.

In one scene, the police raid a rave hosted by Gomes. As the police arrest the partygoers, a woman smoking a cigarette exclaims in English, “This bloody ghati has just spoiled our mood.” In Mumbai, where *Page 3* is pictured, ghati is a classed slur that alludes to backwardness, and, in general, the absence of modern culture. The slur directed at the police officer, a Hindu man, disrupts his normative subjectivity because the woman calls attention to his class and culture that should otherwise be invisible and unacknowledged. The woman, dressed in a cropped jacket and fitted jeans at a party with a cigarette in her hand, is framed in a modernist economy of consumerism. However, Bollywood movies usually frame the Christian woman in wanton-like representations (see Basu, 2010a; Benegal, 2006). The Christian woman seduces the Hindu man, and, in the process, threatens the heterosexual romance that reproduces the nation (Gangoli, 2005; Kasbekar, 2001). Hence, the cigarette-smoking woman at the rave might be read as a stand-in for the Christian inhabiting a space of western modernity.

The police officer walks up to the woman, and questions her in English:

Excuse me, what did you say? GHATI? What do you think, we cops are vernaculars? We cannot speak English? We don't have civic sense? We are uncivilized people? And for your kind information, this vernacular ghati has done his Masters in English Literature from Fergusson College, Pune – the best one.

As the officer reprimands the woman, the camera turns to a Hindu journalist who smiles at the exchange. The journalist's smile invites the audience to approve the officer's response. The two men – journalist and police officer – work together through the smile to challenge the assumption that Hindu men do not inhabit an equally modern space. Furthermore, with him delivering his tirade in English and emphasizing his education in English Literature at an institution tied to colonialism, he demonstrates that modernity is not the domain of the West. Despite his abilities and education, he performs a conservative and traditional India-ness, unlike the westernized woman. In particular, he sutures the differences between western thought and native rationality. He concludes his spiel by pulling the cigarette out of the woman's mouth and extinguishing it under his foot, and then advising her that she should “first try to be a good cultured Indian, then try to be ‘West’ [in air quotes].” The officer's move to extinguish the cigarette under his foot is a metaphor for stamping out the westernization from the woman. His dialogue associates the cigarette with westernization. To emphasize the superiority of Hindu modernity, he puts the West to a swift end under his feet because it is beneath him. Ultimately, the officer shows the woman how to be integrated into Hindu modernity, and the journalist approves through his smile.

As a viewer, I think the scene is misplaced and does not contribute to the movie. However, the scene is fascinating because the officer's maintenance of law and order extends into culture, tradition, and values. It is relevant to note that women wearing western clothing, dancing, and smoking are not novel sights in Bollywood movies or India's landscape, not even in the political climate in which the movie was released. Therefore, the scene may be understood as a discursive construction of Hindu modernity, wherein indigenization that balances modern and tradition is forcefully imbued in the overall structure of the nation. In particular, the officer's liberal education but disdain for a woman smoking (and dancing and drug use) show how Hindu modernity chooses aspects of modernization that are acceptable while wholly rejecting other conditions. As the above scene concludes, the officer lends the journalist a match for his cigarette without hesitation. In addition to the smile of approval, the material exchanges between the two men engender a masculine national community. The two men – one a representative of the state, the other responsible for holding the state accountable – construct a modern-traditional nation that Banerji (2006) fittingly describes as Hindu and male.

In the following scene, the police officer rides with Gomes in the back of the police vehicle. Gomes informs him that he sells drugs to those in the upper levels of the police administration. Gomes has infiltrated the state. The officer grabs him and throws him out of the moving vehicle. The Christian is literally propelled out of the state(-owned vehicle). The Hindu journalist from the previous scene approaches the officer and pacifies him in Hindi, "I know, some problems can only be solved this way." The Hindu men, once again, share a smile in approval of their actions. Basu (2010b) observes that state-sanctioned killings of Muslims neutralize threats to the nation posed by the Other. In *Page 3*, the Christian criminal/drug dealer is immediately disposed of as he becomes a similar menace. Such manslaughter sanitizes the landscape to make the ethnoscape conducive for Hindu modernity. With Gomes hosting raves and infesting the police administration with drugs, he poses a threat to (the) Hindu modernity that espouses values of purity wherein drugs are a pollutant. The threat the Christian man poses places him outside Hindu modernity. Thus, the police officer's responsibilities towards the national community, including maintaining its sanctity, warrant the extra-judicial murder.

Rock On!! is directed by Abhishek Kapoor, and features Farhan Akhtar and Arjun Rampal as protagonists. The movie won "Best Feature Film in Hindi," with Rampal recognized as "Best Supporting Actor" by the National Film Awards. Akhtar was recognized as "Best Male Debut" by the Filmfare Awards. The movie is about a rock band's reunion. The band members consist of two Hindu men, and two Christian men, Joe and Rob. The Christian men are struggling musicians, and use the reunion to launch their careers. The Hindu men participate in the reunion as a recreational activity. The analysis focuses on the contrast between the Christian and Hindu characters, and, in particular, concentrates on social class as a site of competing modernities. The analysis also returns to the scene from the article's opening to reinforce the argument that Hindu modernity integrates a type of Otherness.

In the movie, the Hindu characters are in a space of modernity characterized by wealth. The Christian characters struggle to achieve the same. In the context of wealth, a Marxist position is that modernity is inseparable from capitalism. As capitalism morphs according to the context, in the movie it takes the form of raw capital (money) and social capital (benefits accessed through social networks). The connection between capitalism and modernity is most evident in the upper-class lifestyle of the Hindu characters. Adi is an investment banker who earns a promotion and an office overlooking the city. Adi's home, in particular, exudes his social class. His home is spacious,

with gold-accented décor. KD (Kedar, a.k.a. Killer Drummer) works for his family's high-end jewelry business. The store is spacious and minimalist with leather furniture and textured wooden panels that, once again, exude his social class. Adi and KD's social class discursively construct them in a space of Hindu modernity that balances their participation in hyper-consumerism with ties to tradition through Hindu identities, lineages, and positionalities. However, their Hindu-ness remains unacknowledged.

The differences in social class are the prime signifier of competing modernities. Rob composes jingles, but is unable to secure stable employment. In one scene, he is lying down on a bed in his apartment with Bob Dylan records around him. His apartment is dingy, which indicates a lower social class, and the Dylan records communicate a sense of westernization. Joe owns a store that sells musical instruments, and offers music lessons. He also inherited his family's fish-selling business, which his wife operates. However, an inheritance without generational wealth does not contribute to social progress. The Christian men are financially struggling, and their failures can be attributed to their career choices with rock music. The rock genre is associated with the West, and adopting any western practice in postcolonial sites is complicated by the matrices of modern and traditional. Therefore, rock music in India reverberates in a space of competing modernities. I further situate the framing of the Christian men as struggling musicians in Kumar's (2016) analysis of rock music in India. Kumar is not concerned with religious identity, but their analysis points to musicians' "indeterminate location, their conflicted sense of belonging, and their dilemmas about audience" because the genre is foreign to India (2016: 3116). The Christian men's social mobility may be read as the absence of modernity in their lives because of their investment in rock music – a western practice (see Saldanha, 2002). At the same time, as rock music ties the four men together, the Hindu men pursue it recreationally, whereas the Christian men depend on it for their livelihood. Whereas the Hindu men can balance modernity and tradition, the Christian men do not have access to tradition (read: Hindu-ness) to succeed in a space of European/western modernity.

The differences in social class are addressed in one scene between Debbie, Joe's wife, and Adi. To ensure Joe does not forgo his familial responsibilities, Debbie confronts Adi about the band's upcoming performance. Debbie explains to him in Hindi, "kuch logon ki kismat hi achchi hoti hain (some people have all the luck)...Joe tumhari tarah lucky nahin hain, Aditya (Joe isn't as lucky as you, Aditya)." The exchange calls attention to Adi's normative subjectivity. But the use of specific words subverts all attention from his Hindu-ness. Debbie characterizes Adi's wealth with the Urdu word *kismat* that translates to fate. But her husband's poverty is described as luck. These words are not exactly synonymous: luck is a matter of chance that pivots on an individual's condition, and fate is a matter of what nature bestows on an individual (Rescher, 2014). However, poverty and wealth are conditions of socioeconomics tied to access to capital. Therefore, Debbie's criticism alludes to the proverbial natural order rather than networks of caste, gender, and religion that construct and normalize Adi's inheritance and normative subjectivity. Although Adi's normative subjectivity remains intact, Debbie, the Christian woman, threatens the (re-)union of the Hindu family and friendship.

In a reversal from *Page 3*, the Christian men are invited to participate in Hindu modernity. The scene from the article's opening, which centers on family and friendship, is the invitation. Adi's extension of kinship overlooks differences of caste, class, and religion. The seamless union between the two men is significant because the event communicates that India is modern and secular. Hindu modernity accepts the Other (secularism as accepting difference) as long as the

difference can be integrated. In the following scene, the remaining band members and their families are at a lavish home with an outdoor bar that faces the beach; Rob passes away from cancer. The on-screen text reads “Debbie retired from her fishing business, and is now a successful stylist. KD started a music company in partnership with Joe. They promote new talent.” The reunion provides Joe and his family an entry into Hindu modernity characterized by class mobility – an indicator of progress. But as Joe concludes the movie by improving his socioeconomic status, he can only do so with the Hindu men’s support. Adi’s acceptance of him as family and friend (social capital) enables his progress, then KD’s support as a partner (raw capital/money) launches his business. Joe earns wealth in terms of raw and social capital but under supervision from the Hindu men. The Christian is integrated into the national community but not fully accepted.

Dum Maaro Dum is directed by Rohan Sippy, and features Abhishek Bachchan as the protagonist. The cast includes Bipasha Basu and Rana Daggubati in supporting roles. Basu was awarded “Best Actress in a Thriller or Action” by Stardust Award, while Daggubati was recognized as “Best Male Debut” by Zee Cine Awards. The movie is pictured in Goa – a location of significance for Christianity and Bollywood’s Christians. The historical presence of the Portuguese in Goa, which is re-presented in the spatial infrastructure of movies, discursively constructs contemporary Goa and its inhabitants as Christian, and, therefore, westernized. There are no specific scenes in the movie that exemplify Hindu modernity. But the movie develops in a way that discursively constructs Hindu modernity in opposition to Christian modernity characterized by European/western influences and values.

In *Dum Maaro Dum*, the characters from Goa are Christian, except for one police officer. These characters are Joaquim “Joki” Fernandes, Lawrence “Lorry” Gomes, and Zoey. The latter’s surname is not known, fitting a common stereotype about Christian women characters. These names racialize the characters as Christian and Goa as a space inhabited by Christians. The simultaneous racialization of Christians and Goa imagines an ethnoscape outside the purview of Hindu-ness; Christians, therefore, are the extra-territorial Other. Additionally, the movie frames Goa as a drug haven. Several foreign cartels are operating in Goa, but organized under one anonymous overlord, Barbosa. As the plot develops, Barbosa’s other aliases – Colin Coutinho, Toby Follet, Vincent Vega – are known. These are Christian names. Thus, the Christian overlord benefits from the presence of foreign cartels and controls them. The chaos in Goa can be connected to the westernization for which Christians are recognized, and the European/western modernity associated with the community. The Christian characters have *en masse* corrupted a part of India.

The Ministry of Home Affairs appoints Additional Commissioner of Police (ACP) Vishnu to eradicate the drug cartels from Goa. Vishnu is portrayed as a rogue cop purchasable for the right price. He describes his pension for corruption in Hindi stating, “I was Gandhi’s follower, but the one printed on currency.” The dialogue is notable because he acknowledges his corruptibility yet remains a sought-after officer in the upper-levels of the police administration. It is tempting to connect his ethics and reputation to argue that he is redeemable because of his identity as a Hindu man. His confession also reinforces the full force of normative subjectivity. While Vishnu himself calls attention to his reputation – acknowledged and visible – it is rendered irrelevant and unseen.

Additionally, Vishnu’s name is significant. Lord Vishnu is one of three gods of the Hindu trinity. Lord Vishnu’s role is that of preservation and protection; he maintains life on earth. I acknowledge such names are commonplace; however, the ordinariness of Hinduism in everyday culture furthers the argument that Hindu-ness – as culture or religion – is omnipresent. Just as *Page*

3 imbues the cinematic universe with Hindu modernity, *Dum Maaro Dum* also represents Hindu-ness as a solution to Goa's problems. Therefore, the appointment of ACP Vishnu to Goa Police to bring law and order to an apparently Christian-inhabited state collides modernities in a mythic way.

Vishnu comes close to uncovering Barbosa's identity as he carves into Goa's underbelly. However, Barbosa uses his connections in the police administration to arrange for Vishnu's assassination. Once again, a Christian criminal drug-dealer has penetrated the state. Vishnu is eventually murdered, but he leaves clues for Joki to find Barbosa's drugs. Joki locates the drugs, and then hides them in an electric crematorium prepared for Vishnu. As Vishnu is liberated from his body, Goa is liberated from the drug problem. In death, ACP Vishnu saves Goa and the residents. But death and liberation reverse religious discourses in Christian Goa: Vishnu replaces Jesus as the savior, and, subsequently, Hindu modernity characterized by purity (in the sense of eradicating a drug problem) supplants the previous modernity defined by chaos and drugs.

Furthermore, reading ACP Vishnu as an avatar from Hindu mythology, Lord Vishnu's role is to annihilate evil, protect the pious, and reestablish the Hindu social order. Albeit ACP Vishnu perishes in his role as the protector and preserver, his death restores life. These myths parallel Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Therefore, Vishnu's death in Goa is symbolic because it replaces European/western modernity that is foreign to India with an indigenized modernity. Such a conclusion is not to suggest that European/western modernity is related to Christianity. Rather, Christianity and modernity as western products are treated as equally foreign in India. This hodgepodge of the West is characteristic of Hindu modernity that conflates all the values of the Other into a monolith.

The ways in which Bollywood movies imagine the Christian as the extra-territorial Other show how ethnoreligious communities are part of the nation. The Christian is included in the national community to show how Indian/Hindu modernity exists better than the European version. The undertaking of such a modernizing venture shows how the nation imagines itself through language in the literal usage of English versus Hindi, the rhetoric of India versus the West, signifiers such as religion, and texts that narrate the nation that discursively constructs a cultural and national identity that is Hindu (Basu, 2016). The national community is pedagogic in setting boundaries of belonging, and performative in excluding despite including (Edwards & Ramamurthy, 2017). However, the ways gender, history, identity, social space, and tradition intersect in the discursive construction of the mythic and masculinist national community makes Hindu modernity appear derivative of and reactionary to colonialism.

Conclusion

The reactionary nature of Hindu modernity questions the purpose of an indigenized and nativist modernity. In particular, I am concerned with the future of modernity: will it be better than the past and present models? How is modernity encoded in tradition different? Mirchandani (2005) shares the same skepticism about the past, present, and future of modernity, and rejects the idea of modernity or wanting to be "modern" as the continuation of domination and subordination under a new guise. Indian/Hindu modernity as a modernizing venture but in a derivative and reactionary configuration perpetuates the postcolonial misery instead of imagining alternatives for constituting a national community and identifying traditional modes of social organization. The inability to

imagine the Self outside European constructs of the nation and world, the failure to unhinge native rationality from European epistemologies, the difficulty in moving past reactionary discourses freezes the postcolonial in time – not pre-modern time, but in a period of struggle wherein the past is inaccessible and ideas for the present and futures are borrowed.

As reactionary to colonialism but, in the process, mimicking European modernity that dominates and subordinates, Hindu modernity is an ambivalent discourse. The ambivalence is evident in the way the absence of Hindu-ness is addressed. Should the absence be corrected through discipline like the woman from *Page 3*, integrated with supervision like Joe from *Rock On!!*, assimilated into an overarching Hindu-ness like the people of Goa in *Dum Maaro Dum*, or disposed of like Gomes? The ambivalence traps native rationality in a colonial-modernist discourse that is unable to contain the Other within a binary system of exclusion/inclusion, attraction/repulsion, and, in the Indian context, Christian/Hindu as Indian. However, Hall's (1996) characterization of postcolonialism as the departure from binary structures can offer ways to think about ambivalence. To solve the problem of the Other – to establish a Hindu nation – is a reactionary discourse established in colonialism. A progressive discourse is to realize that Hindu-ness and Otherness are not binary oppositions (à la post-structural native rationality). And, a radical discourse is to accept the nation-state is a reactionary discourse too.

An analysis of Bollywood movies within a framework of modernity illustrates some problems of discursively constructing a modern nation-state as reactionary to colonialism. Bollywood movies, irrespective of the political climate, imagine and represent India as Hindu. The possibilities of a Hindu homeland, one that the Hindu Right wants to actualize, is imagined by Bollywood – an industry that began as a proponent of democracy and secularism (see Lutgendorf, 2006; Wright, 2015). There is a continuity in the politics of the Hindu Right and the centrists, liberals, and secularists. The Hindu Right practices a politics of extermination, while the centrists, liberals, and secularists practice a politics of domination that similarly refuses equal treatment to difference. The post-2014 Hindu Right and Narendra Modi have created a tense political climate for ethnoreligious minoritized communities, but it is worth wondering if there ever was an epoch in India to be minoritized?

Notes

¹ A remarkable characteristic of everyday culture is that sometimes a name is enough to foreclose an individual within an ethnoreligious identity. For example, Joseph is Christian, Mohamad is Muslim, Vishnu is Hindu. These characteristics repeat in Bollywood movies, and characters with a western name and surname are scripted as Christian. But Christians in real life do not follow such naming practices. Christians speak a variety of languages and possess an archive of names in their regional languages. Scripting Christian characters with names such as Joseph Mascarenhas ignores the community's diversity, and conflates the numerous denominations with Catholicism and Catholicism's history in India. Furthermore, Christian characters with Indian-language (read: Hindu) names are not distinguishable from other ethnoreligious characters. Bollywood's christening affixes characters into an already established meaning system. Therefore, connecting a name to religion is one strategy to analyze Bollywood movies that include minoritized bodies.

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